

Horse Lovers

By MYRNA WALSH



Michelle Gillespie and "Lucky."

Duxbury is a horsey town. Maybe not as much as Dover or Hamilton, but on almost any day you can find a teenage girl astride a horse, frolicking on the sand or clopping along the streets.

One girl, who brought her animal to the soccer semifinals, probably had the best seat in the house.

Some people say owning a horse is an expensive way to manufacture manure. But they miss completely the special bond between horse and owner.

Michelle Gillespie of Autumn Ave. explained how she felt when she got her black Appaloosa, Lucky. "In the beginning I wanted Lucks to be my friend, like Alex Ramsey had in 'The Black Stallion,' like all those other books I'd read." She even admitted, "He was going to be like Mr. Ed and talk to me."

Lucky, whose show name is Intangible, came to the Gillespie home when he was 6 months old and Michelle was 11. Neither had any experience in horse training. "There's a big difference between taking lessons once a week on an old school horse and having your own horse. When I started he was just a little baby horse and needed to be halter broken. It sounds easy to teach a horse to lead, but if he's at all obstinate and if you're a tiny bit worried about what you're doing, he's going to sense it and be a problem."

The strong-willed horse had little respect for the young girl, who wanted a 4-legged friend. Several professional trainers looked at the black horse with the flaring nostrils and recommended that the Gillespies sell him for dog food.

In the jargon of horse training, "slow work" is that tedious, consistent training that builds on the horse's character to produce a champion. Working at the end of a long line, Lucky developed power and responsiveness. Though he had once been mistaken for a Hanoverian, a breed that sells for between \$8,000 and \$12,000, Lucky is a winner because of what Michelle taught him—what he carries in his head and muscles.

The horse that would be dog meat became a champion, just as in a Disney movie. Before moving to Duxbury Michelle was junior high score rider at the Princeton Riding Center Dressage Shows, and Delaware Valley Maiden Hunter Champion. She also received special recognition from the Eastern States Dressage Ass'n for achievement in 1978 and 1979. She and her sisters, Heather and Colleen, have a family room full of ribbons, mostly blue—each ribbon indicating hours of patient conditioning.

Michelle does dressage "because it's a more accurate way of riding. In equitation, in which the rider is judged, the form is stylized but not effective for controlling the horse. At dressage shows, judges tell riders specifically where they went wrong. The pace is slower and everyone knows where they are going. It's a thinking sport. In showing and jumping you have to think to some degree but a lot happens so fast you can't really build up on it. You can help the horse jump over the fence, but in the end it's the horse who's jumping."

Dressage, which has been called the ballet of horsemanship, involves balance, rhythm and poise as the horse responds to the small shifts in the rider's weight, the brush of a heel or the pressure of a finger tip. Three judges score both rider and horse on 20 separate movements in a time limit, watching for harmonious lightfooted grace. Riders work without a whip.

It disturbs her to see the whip misused. "I've seen people at a horse show take a whip and beat an animal for refusing (to make a jump). Beat him up all over the place."

Aside from the revulsion of seeing an animal abused, she was furious that a rider had let winning become so important. "There are 2 approaches to showing. If you're doing it as a business (to breed or

ell a 'name' horse), then winning is everything and ou're going to do everything to win. My feeling bout showing is that it's a testing ground to show ow my work at home has gone. To see how we perform in a pressure situation. And if my horse has one well,, even if he hasn't won a ribbon, I don't are. If he hasn't done well, but we win a ribbon, I still feel a sense of dissatisfaction with that performance.

"To some people it's so important to win that hey'll cut people off when the judges aren't looking. It's a game -- to have your horse looking his best when the judges are looking at that moment. Or riding a horse's fault. Instead of going home and working on it and getting it right.

"There are other things like riding a horse all day he day before a show to make sure he's quiet. And a lot of people will have a trainer with them at the show. I've never had my instructor or trainer with me at a show just because I have a better feeling about myself and what I've done if I do it myself."

She said that a top-flight horse may cost close to \$2,000 with lessons going for \$20 to \$50 an hour. "You could get a shrink for you and your horse for that amount," she laughed.

Linda Carbone

Linda Carbone of Union St., to use a John Wayne expression, sits tall in the saddle. A slim, almost elegant rider, the 17-year-old recently returned from the Junior Olympics for Appaloosas, where she was one of 2 teenagers representing the state.

The 3-day competition included stall care, western, saddle and hunt seat, and open showing. With an average of 40 entries in each class, Linda won one hird place, 2 fourths and a fifth.

This summer she also traveled "the Appy circuit," living in her motorhome with her mom. Highlight of the season was winning high point youth championship at the Chesire (N.H.) show.

Linda keeps her horse, Holiday's Champagne lady ("Punky"), in top condition with regular workouts. Before a show "I really have to do a lot of work, so winning a trophy is really rewarding. Everytime I get on her I learn more and she learns more."

Because she shows regularly, including the half dozen competitions run by the South Shore Horsemen's Council each year, she is a champion. Traveling a wider circuit means putting herself up against tougher competition and she looks forward o this testing.

Next summer she and her family will be back on

But she will postpone going on to college because she expects to breed her mare this winter. Though she plans to sell the foal, which may be born next January, she knows it will be difficult to part with the young horse. "I was 7 when I had my first horse and it was pretty sad around here when we sold him. It was too expensive to keep both him and the new one." She has seen a horse she previously owned at a show and said, "I'd like to think they remember (former owners), but I don't really think they do."

Linda spoke about her gentle mare waiting for her to get off the school bus each day; she talked about communicating with her. But Linda doesn't romanticize the animal. She thinks of her horse in 3 ways: as an investment (average show horse cost about \$2,000-\$3,000, feed about \$60 per month); a way to improve her riding skills and as a partner.

Riding in competition is also a learning experience for her. "Every time I go into the ring, I seem to learn something. The judges talk to you afterwards and tell you where you can improve.

"I'm nervous before I go in, but by the time the class is called I forget about being nervous and concentrate."

Linda competes in 3 classes -- halter in which the horse is judged on its conformation; equitation, the rider is judged; and pleasure, the teammanship of rider and horse.

She also competes in trail rides which cover 20 miles in 4 hours. "You want to pace yourself so you finish and the horse isn't all-run out."

Her advice to novice riders: "Don't quit." She has literally picked herself up, dusted herself off, and swung back into the saddle.

Clara Benevides

Clara Benevides of Winter St. first saw Princess waiting to be slaughtered. Her owners didn't want her any longer and sold her to the slaughter house for 7 cents a pound -- about \$70. Clara explained that the horses are left in a barren field without food for the 2-3 weeks wait until it's their turn. "Animals know death is waiting for them. They can smell it," she said.

Princess, saved 7 years ago, is now 32 and Clara's favorite. But she isn't the only horse the small blond woman has rescued. "I always loved horses. Can't live away from them. And can't stand to see them abused," she said.

Once, driving by a corral, Clara saw a starving pony. She returned, discovered that the animals had been given just rotten vegetables as feed and promptly offered to take care of the creature. "It was too weak to get into the trailer," she remembered.

The pony thrived under Clara's foster care. In the past 24 years she has been a foster mother to nearly 35 animals. Occasionally she has returned a horse when it was too sick or lame to respond to care. Others have found new homes through her informal

Auxbury Clipper

Section 2 Thursday, December 4, 1980

matchmaking service.

During the winter she will try to find shelters for some of her animals. She requires horse-sitters to provide a snug shelter with a door and a window. Otherwise, she said, the horse becomes moonblind if they are in the dark all winter.

"I personally cannot sleep if an animal is outside. Their noses get cold."

Sometimes the loan of a horse becomes permanent. "As long as they're good to them, I let them keep their horses."

This devotion to horses means that Clara, a grandmother, often has to drag 100-pound bags of grain or 50-pound bales of hay to the stalls. The horses don't earn their keep, though. "I used to let people ride so I could keep the horses, but that was before the law required stables to be licensed."

Most people in town know the Benevides tan and brown truck-horse trailer, with "Horses" in 2-foot high letters across the back. For 4 years she was in charge of mounted units in the Fourth of July parade. But in 1977, someone threw a firecracker under Princess, who was pulling a small carriage. The horse bolted, slipped and fell. And the carriage toppled over, spilling the young passenger. Now Clara refuses to ride in the parade.

She is obviously devoted to her animals. "Horses are my luxury. Some people go to Europe or drink or socialize and no one thinks anything about it. Horses are what I do."

Sometimes what begins with the romanticism of the lore of horses and the thrill of taming the power of the beast, after many years, leads the horse lover away from conventional social etiquette. One man, who agreed to be interviewed for this article, kept the reporter waiting for 20 minutes in sub-freezing temperature, then refused to answer any questions when he was not guaranteed the right to see the story before it was printed. You might say he was a horse of a different color.